

# PLAYBOARD NI

*Manifesto 2024*



**Play is central to children and young people's lives, supporting the development of knowledge, skills and abilities that enhance their social, physical and emotional well-being.**

## **The Right to Play**

The child's right to play is enshrined within Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The UNCRC grants all children and young people (aged 17 and under) a comprehensive set of rights and was ratified by the UK government in 1991, committing all branches of government to ensuring that children are afforded the rights and protections contained within its articles.

In 2013, the UN adopted General Comment 17 clarifying for governments worldwide the meaning and importance of Article 31. The purpose of the general comment was to highlight the critical role of play in children and young people's lives and to emphasise the central role of play in supporting the development of health, well-being and education.

It is important to recognise that all rights in the Convention are indivisible and interdependent. Article 31 is central to the realisation of many rights. Equally, other rights must be respected in order to guarantee the realisation of Article 31.

### **ARTICLE 31 STATES**

- i. That every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
- ii. That member governments shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

**We call on all political parties to recognise and value the importance of play, championing its role in supporting our children and young people as they recover from the impact of Covid-19.**

*You can show your support for play through:*

## LEGISLATION FOR PLAY

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## POLICY FOR PLAY

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## LEADERSHIP FOR PLAY

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## FUNDING FOR PLAY-BASED SCHOOL-AGE CHILDCARE

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Prior to Covid-19, children and young people faced many barriers to meeting their play needs, often based around a lack of time, space and permission to play in the communities in which they live.

An already challenging situation has been further exacerbated by the pandemic which has seen a further decline in physical, social and creative play opportunities, leading to increased levels of inactivity, contributing to rising childhood obesity levels and resulting in poverty of experience for our children and young people.

Social isolation, whilst necessary to combat Covid-19 and the excessive use of screens and technology during lockdowns, has further led to many children experiencing increased levels of anxiety alongside longer term mental health and emotional issues.

PlayBoard is calling on all political parties to show leadership on this issue, not only recognising the critical role play has in supporting recovery from Covid-19, but actively advocating for and championing full incorporation of the Right to Play, alongside all other articles of the UNCRC. In order to achieve the level of change that is required, PlayBoard is calling for four key commitments:

### LEGISLATION FOR PLAY

The need for clear legislation to support and enhance the planning and resourcing of play across our communities has never been so important.

PlayBoard is calling for the introduction of a Statutory Duty for Play Sufficiency which would introduce a legal duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities within their areas. A Play Sufficiency Duty would help to ensure that the play needs of all children are met through the development of quality, accessible play opportunities for all ages and ability levels, bringing Northern Ireland into line with the devolved administrations in Wales and Scotland.

PlayBoard is asking political parties to commit to supporting the development of a Statutory Duty for Play Sufficiency in Northern Ireland aligned to the Executive's current Children and Young People's Strategy (2021-2025), enhancing local focus and delivering improved opportunities for play and recreation at community level.

### POLICY FOR PLAY

The NI Executive's Play and Leisure Policy was launched in 2009 with an Implementation Plan agreed in 2011. There is a clear need for the Executive to review, revise and update this policy to take into account the changing circumstances we now find ourselves in.

Play is a cross-cutting policy issue affecting, amongst others, the departments of health, education, communities and justice. The development of a focused policy for play is essential if we are to ensure that adequate strategic direction and financial resourcing is made available for play across all Executive departments.

PlayBoard is calling on all political parties to support and advocate for the development of a new Play Policy aligned to the Executive's Children and Young People's Strategy, embedding recognition of play across all strategic departments and ensuring strategic and practical action to meet play need across Northern Ireland.

### LEADERSHIP FOR PLAY

The need for a strong political focus on play and its importance to health, well-being, education and skills development has never been so important.

PlayBoard is calling for the appointment of a dedicated Play Champion to provide focus, scrutiny, and ensure that recognition of play and the right to play is embedded across all aspects of government in Northern Ireland.

### FUNDING FOR PLAY-BASED SCHOOL-AGE CHILDCARE

The development of the Early Years and Childcare Strategy is long overdue and very much welcomed. PlayBoard for many years has been advocating the link between play and care and as such, has been at the forefront of the development of the school-age childcare sector. This sector provides critical childcare support for parents and offers quality play-based provision for school aged children.

PlayBoard is calling on all political parties to ensure that a robust and integrated Childcare Strategy for children aged 0 to 14 years is implemented for Northern Ireland, which is underpinned by a recognised workforce and adequate financial resources.



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